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BASIC ENGLISH
AS AN AID TO LANGUAGE COMMUNICATION
IN THE PACIFIC.

Institute of Pacific Relations

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INTRODUCTION

In the report of the Program Committee at Shanghai, November 3rd, 1931, was included the following recommendation:

That the Pacific Council request the Secretariat by correspondence with the National Councils:

1. To inquire into and evaluate the methods by which other international bodies are endeavoring to deal with the problems of diversity of language among their constituents.
2. To report on other possible methods that may have been suggested by various people and groups, as to: (a) methods of mutual interpretation, (b) the uses of auxiliary international language.
3. To report on the progress made in different Pacific countries with efforts to spread a knowledge of the languages spoken in other Pacific countries.
4. To review, more specifically, the efforts made by the different national councils of the Institute to stimulate the provision of facilities for such language study.
5. To consider possible ways in which the Institute might best meet its own immediate language problem while larger efforts to overcome the inequalities inherent in its present reliance upon the use of English are under way.

Among other measures taken by the American Council in response to this request has been the investigation of Basic English. Several preliminary translations of I.P.R. material were followed by a conference held at Stockbridge, Mass., July 20th--24th for the purposes of studying the possibilities of the system with particular reference to the needs of the I.P.R. in publications and for conference use. The presence of G. K. Ogden, Director of the Orthological Institute, Cambridge, England, Dr. I. A. Richards, Magdalene College, Cambridge, Lenore W. Lockhart, Assistant Director of the Orthological Institute, and Mr. and Mrs. A. B. Rossitor, formerly of Etajima Naval College, Japan and translators of several of the Basic books made possible a thorough-going exploration. The discussion covered the several most important aspects of Basic English: its possible use as an auxiliary international language; its use as a time-saving method of teaching English with the advantage of being complete in itself for purposes of fluent communication as well as being one stage towards further literary English if that should happen to be the desired end; and its use as an instrument of analysis of language and thought.

Illustrations of this last point may be seen in the specimen translations where a word not in the Basic list must be translated by definition. So it is that a word with a complex knot of meanings is automatically untangled, as the one aspect of it which applies in a given context must be separated and stated before it can be translated. The appended poem of Vaughan, --a difficult seventeenth century lyric -- with its elucidation in Basic will suggest several ways in which Basic may be an implement for teaching to those whose national language is English as well as to others.

As a result of the Stockbridge conference, the American Council decided that further experiment in I.P.R. material might prove profitable. Mr. W. L. Holland consented to the translation of his opening speech for the Banff Conference, and with his close and helpful cooperation, the first experiment was presented to you in the blue pamphlet, "Conflict and Control in the Pacific." Several people have already reported going through it without any realization that it was other than normal English. Except for the words which are explained in the notes at the back of the pamphlet, only the Basic words, with some of the supplementary list for Economics have been used.

A brief outline of the system, with a suggestion of its background follows. (V.II - 10, American Council Fortnightly Memoranda.)

MEMORANDUM ON BASIC ENGLISH AS AN AID TO LANGUAGE

COMMUNICATION IN THE PACIFIC

Problems of symbolism and the nature of language communication have puzzled philosophers since the days of Parmenides, but until Locke wrote Book III of the Essay on Human Understanding, nothing like a systematic study of them was attempted. Locke is concerned with the use and abuse of words and their deceptive ambiguities, and suggests that an examination of the imperfections of language would alone resolve a large number of disputes and would bring both knowledge and peace more nearly within reach. It was these reflections which led Leibnitz to the consideration, not of remedying the imperfections of existing languages, but of inventing a new one -- an ideal notation, somewhat similar to Chinese, which would serve as a universal language "for easy communication with distant nations." This project he was never able to carry out, but it was his linguistic enquiries which gave the impetus for the founding of the science of Comparative Philology. Since then philology has run its course, entirely monopolizing the field of language studies, with the single important exception of the work of Jeromy Bentham on linguistic fictions. Bentham anticipated the modern introduction of psychology and logic into linguistics which for the first time makes possible a methodological approach to the science of symbolism.

In the course of this development, since Leibnitz and Bishop Wilkins made their propositions for an international language, a solution to the

problem of universal communication has been sought by scientists and philologists through improvement and extension of existing scientific notation and through such artificial simplifications as Esperanto, Ido and its successor Novial, all constructed inflectionally on the model of European, and more particularly Romance languages. With the failure of these systems for all practical purposes, it remained to try the adaptation and simplification of some existing language. C. K. Ogden, of Magdalene College, Cambridge, has done this systematically in Basic English, using the resources of psychology, logic, and modern 'orthology.' The aim of Basic English is not to be an ideal philosophic language but to provide a workable solution to the communication problems of a world with no less than 1500 living languages.

English was chosen because it is the natural or administrative language of 500,000,000 people. As it has no inflections and is analytic in structure, it is not only closer to the language habits of many orientals, Chinese being similarly inflectionless and analytic, but for the same reason is easier to learn and more susceptible to successful simplification than any other European language. With some knowledge of the language already so widespread, and with the unquestioned superior flexibility and psychological and historical continuity of a natural language, Basic has a unique claim to the attention of all who are interested in solving the increasingly vital language problems, which are most acute in the Pacific area.

The System of Basic English

Basic English is a language of 850 words, of which 600 are nouns, 150 adjectives, 16 verbs or names of operators - and the rest adverbs, or prepositions or names of directions. These, in addition to numbers, weights and measures, and the calendar and such words as club, radio and telegram which are already internationalized, do the work of the 500,000 words of English at a level of ordinary communication. For more specialized use, supplementary vocabularies of 50 words are supplied in particular fields as for science, or for economics and commerce. The grammatical rules are simply summarized as follows:- plurals in s, derivatives in - or - ed - ing from 300 nouns, adverbs in 'ly' from qualifiers, degree with 'more' or 'most', questions by inversion and by 'do'; operators and pronouns conjugated in full. Widely differentiated uses of a word are eliminated, as 'for' in the sense of 'because' or 'that' in the sense of a relative pronoun, or 'bit' as a part of a horse's harness, but the full range of allowed uses of each word is clearly outlined in "The Basic Words", rather for the guidance of English-speaking people who are limiting their normal use of words than for the oriental who learns them first, unconscious of such possible ambiguities.

The process of simplification consisted in reducing language to one stage nearer the level of factual description for which most of our normal

vocabulary is demonstrably a short-hand. Almost all verbs can be analyzed into one of a few fundamental operations in combination with a directive. The simplest combinations of such of these as appear in the Basic vocabulary give equivalents for 2,000 common verbs (as 'put in' for 'insert', 'go up' for 'climb', 'take out' for 'extricate', 'go against a law' for 'break a law'). Most fictions or abstractions, which form so much of ordinary speech, can easily be reduced to simpler and more intelligible terms. All words which have principally emotive power, all which are too technical for a normal level of communication, and all which are primarily stylistic, can be eliminated with no loss to sense. Such of these as are not easily dispensed with in special fields are included in the supplementary special vocabularies mentioned above, for use only in those fields. In the same way, by descriptive analysis, many names of things can be reduced to less telescopic terms, as a 'journalist' becomes a 'newspaper-man', and a 'desk' a 'writing-table'. The working of Basic depends on the manipulation of word combinations, and it relies for intelligibility, as all language does to a great extent, on context.

The Present Status of Basic

Basic English is now ready in a complete form with the publication of the "ABC of Basic English", which gives a full outline of the system for learning; The Basic Words, containing a complete account of the uses of the 850; "The Basic Dictionary" which gives the Basic equivalents for the 18,000 uses of the 7500 commonest English words. The interest which it has already aroused from Japan to Scandinavia, indicates the far-reaching use to which it may be put in the not distant future. Correspondence has poured into the Orthological Institute in Cambridge, the research headquarters for Basic, from all parts of the United States. Schools on the Pacific coast are interested in using it in the nationalization of their oriental children. Institutions studying immigration have inquired about it; radio, moving-picture, telephone and other international commercial organizations are anxious to use Basic as their communication medium. In China, where, as Dr. W.W. Yen pointed out in an address in Peking, Jan. 13, 1931, English is by far the most widespread of any foreign language, many English words being incorporated in Chinese, and there are over 1000 scholars who have taken higher degrees in English or American Universities, several universities in Peking and Nanking are considering courses in Basic. In Japan, where the learning of

foreign languages is so much more difficult than in China, Basic promises to be proportionately more useful. Prof. Okakura of Tokyo, Professor Doi of Sendai, Mr. Daniels at Otaru, and others, are working on it and planning to have it systematically taught. A journal, "The Basic Monthly" is being printed and it has already been successfully taught to Japanese wishing to learn English.

All this says nothing of the spread of interest in Basic in other parts of the world which has been considerable; but it is enough to indicate that its value in the Pacific might be very great - a welcome solution to the problem of an auxiliary language. It is not easy to give exact figures as to its present status in the United States or in the Far East, because the situation is continually developing. The system has not been completed long enough to allow of more than a few exchanges of correspondence with centres in China and Japan, but several projects now under consideration may have far-reaching effects on the future of the international language question.

{A comparison of the first paragraph of The Memorandum with the Basic version given below will give some idea of how the system works.}

BASIC VERSION OF THE FIRST PARAGRAPH.

"Note on Basic English as a help in the language questions of the Pacific.

Questions as to what signs are, what language is, and how the exchange of ideas takes place have been troubling the wise men from the days of Parmenides, but Book III of Locke's 'Essay on Human Understanding' was the first work on language which gave signs of having a system at the back of it. Locke is interested in the right and wrong uses of words, and in those senses which are not clear, or may be taken in two ways; and he makes the point that looking into the network of errors caused by language would by itself put an end to a great number of arguments, and would make knowledge and peace more possible. It was these thoughts which gave Leibnitz the idea, not of changing any language in existence, but of making a new one, clear and simple, not unlike Chinese in form for use as an international language 'for the simple exchange of ideas with far-off nations'. He was not able to give effect to this idea, but it was his questionings into the theory of language which were chiefly responsible for the development of the history of language as a science. From then till now, this science has been worked out in all its details and no interest has been

taken in other sides of the language question but for the important work of Jeremy Bentham on word-fictions. Bentham was the first to make use of psychology and the science of reason in connection with language; a development which has been of such great value in making possible for the first time the building up of a theory of signs on which a new science of language may be based."

ACCOUNT of some VERSES
in
BASIC ENGLISH.

Leave, leave thy gadding thoughts;
Who pores
And spies
Still out of door
Descries
Within them nought.

The skin and shell of things
Though fair
Are not
Thy wish or prayer;
But got
By more despair
Of wings.

To rack old elements
Or dust
And say
Sure here he must
Needs stay
Is not the way
Nor just.

Henry Vaughan.

(Note: in all copies "he" in line 4 of verses 3 has a small letter.)

OBSERVATIONS.

Leave: come away from (as persons): not take with you (things).
The use of the word twice gives the feeling of someone starting to get angry, or tired of waiting:

Thy : (See Special Forms)

Gadding: going about without any fixed purpose, looking only for some uncertain amusement of no value; with a tendency to doing wrong because of having no interests. "gadding girls" e.g.

Pore (s): looking at with great attention, like a book-lover; the same suggestion that the act of not of great value; the interest only great-seeming: a little foolish.

Spies (spy): one keeping secret watch on others is a Spy: or a man sent into other countries to make secret observations. Suggestion of false behaviour &c.

Still: (i) at this time: out of the house when he had better be in some other place: (ii) though against (orders, decisions &c) (iii) though (he pores, though he spies, he will see - nothing)

Describes: sees, will see - of things uncertain in distance or bad light: or of thoughts in the mind.

(("Come away from those gadding thoughts: he who gives every sort of attention (pores, spies) to things outside (his mind, heart, &c) sees only nothing inside. Or sees that he is seeing nothing.))

((OR "he who gives....attention....against orders, knowledge, &c)))

Shell: hard outside of some animals, insects: like "skin", something which keeps the (true) inside from being seen; which may be beautiful (fair) while the inside is not. (? Suggestion from the Fathers of the Church - that the pleasure-giving things on earth only seem to be beautiful and good: they are not true: inside, they are disgusting - and so, false; Women, in special).

Wish: Thing desired: used as half opposite, or balanced against the word "prayer".

Prayer: Request to Higher Powers (God) for:- (i) what is good (ii) what is desired. Comparison between what is secretly desired (wish) and what may be publicly (openly) requested (with one's approval, &c (prayer). Another suggestion (the same as in Verso i) "You are false even to yourself").

Got: Taken, (as second best): (ii ? produced (like babies).)

More despair: simply despair, only despair (and what a small thing!) D. = the feeling of being without hope or power - of complete loss. The feeling of being unable to keep the high position (wings) which is his right one.

Wings: power of 'flight': of lifting oneself: of getting to higher (more important) things - of getting away from the level of existence of common men: and towards the existence of the angels (which have wings - and which he may become like).

Rack: (verb) (i) from instrument for giving pain by stretching the body used to get statements from prisoners (= to get something (not necessarily true) out of someone by force &c. (ii) from the idea of "twisting" or stretching unnaturally - to get a forced statement (generally false). = turning opinions, thoughts, to a desired end by force.

Elements: (i) Bases of knowledge: first and simplest statements (the first teachings, rules).
(ii) simplest possible substances of which all other things are made.

Dust: Powder of broken-down substances: living bodies certain to come to death. Suggestion that the "old" elements (air, fire, water, earth) have no longer authority: that living bodies seem to be different - though from the end of the verse, no better: equally material.

Sure: It is certain that.... There is no doubt....

Here: (with strong stress): in these things (of solid earth):

He: The Maker (present in his makings, works). "Must needs stay" = there is no doubt about his being in those things (of his keeping in these things - material bodies). "Our knowledge of God is from His being present in all the works of His hands: it is not necessary to go farther. (A false argument).

The Way: (i) The way to God (ii) The right way of living (iii) of reasoning (Your argument is false).

Just: The senses go with those of "way". (i) right, straight, ("holy") (ii) like the behaviour of the good: straight, in the picture-sense, "upright" (iii) right (of reasoning): = (not false) true (of argument) (iv) not "just" behaviour in your position (as one different from other men (cf. Bible story: the Unjust Steward):
The writer has given his days and powers to God.

Feeling: a little tired with himself for his false arguments, coming after his loss of power to keep his thoughts in control. Like a father with a child which has done wrong; kind, but making it clear that the wrong doing was conscious. A certain sense of his knowledge that he is small - looking down on his errors. At the same time, the knowledge that he is marked off from common men.

Tone: In agreement with the feeling of self-knowledge. The way of writing is as if to himself - private; one reason for the short lines and different senses in which important words may be taken. Another reason seems to be that he has in mind the motion of a song - the running short lines giving back the same note, and then coming with a fall to an important word (e.g. "nought") "There is no need to give YOU a long account: I see your heart, you are better than others; but even you are now false your better knowledge used as a coat for desired errors."

Intention: Self-knowledge: without much hope of changing. If we say we are without wrong, we are in error. And as answer to the light run of the song (?) No design on a possible reader: as if from a day book: the note of a stage on the Way.